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► U.S. DISTRICT COURT

Plant owner sentenced on asbestos charges

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CONCORD – A one-time owner of the former Johns-Manville plant in Nashua was sentenced Monday to 14 months in prison for allowing sloppy, illegal asbestos removal at the plant.

Stephen Draper of Woburn, Mass., had pleaded guilty in April to one of three federal asbestos charges he faced in U.S. District Court.

Draper was ordered to surrender himself to federal prison authorities Oct. 10. In the meantime, he hopes to resolve other, unrelated environmental charges in New York

state, according to his lawyer, Robert Daidone. Draper also was fined \$1,000.

Draper was accused of having workers dismantle boilers and other equipment at the Bridge Street plant – since demolished – in 1992 and 1994 without taking precautions to deal with the asbestos contained in the equipment.

A mineral once popular as fire-retardant building and insulating material, asbestos has fallen out of use since health studies showed its loose fibers can cause debilitating respiratory illness. The removal and disposal of asbestos is strictly regulated.

Draper ignored those regulations when he directed removal of asbestos while salvaging scrap metal from the plant, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials charged.

EPA investigators found “hundreds of bags” of asbestos and loose, fraying asbestos strewn throughout the building when they searched it in July 1994. The aging plant had become an eyesore and danger to the Bridge Street neighborhood, and it was demolished in the early part of 1997 after it was taken over by the city.

Before pleading guilty, Draper initially faced three asbestos-related charges, punishable by

dozens of years in jail and up to \$750,000 in fines.

At the hearing Monday, Daidone asked Judge Joseph DiClerico to allow Draper to serve some portion of his sentence in home confinement or on an electronic monitoring program.

The EPA’s lawyer, Jeremy Korzenik, objected, noting that the plea bargain called for 14 months in prison – no more, no less.

Asked whether he wanted to say anything on his own behalf, Draper mentioned that he had just won custody of his 14-year-old daughter and that his son was about to

enter college, having finished a stint in the U.S. Marine Corps.

“Actually, your honor, I’m kind of speechless at this whole thing. I’m at a loss for words . . . It’s all beyond me,” Draper said.

Draper still faces criminal charges in New York state, stemming from his demolition and salvage work at an oil tank farm in the mid-1990s, EPA Special Agent John Gauthier said. Draper’s firm removed the tanks but left behind old oil that had been stored inside them, he said.

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